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1857

Forster Charles Henry.

Oration delivered at Independent
Academy, Manchester, Maryland

July 4, 1857



Class E286

Book .M26
1857

SMITHSONIAN DEPOSIT

ORATION,

DELIVERED AT THE

Independent Academy,

MANCHESTER, MARYLAND,

JULY 4, 1857.

BY

CHARLES HENRY FOSTER.

Ego fateor, me his studiis esse deditum: ceteros pudeat, si qua ita se literis
abdiderunt, ut nihil possint ex his ad communem afferre fructum.—CICERO

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CORRESPONDENCE.

INDEPENDENT ACADEMY, }
Manchester, Md., July 9, 1857. }

C. H. FOSTER, ESQ., SIR:—In pursuance of the wish of the students, we were appointed a Committee to wait on you for the purpose of soliciting a copy of your Oration, delivered at the Independent Academy, Manchester, Md., on the 4th inst., for publication. Deeming it, sir, a rare production of study and patriotism, we most humbly hope you will comply with the unanimous desire of the students of our institution.

Yours respectfully,

W. S. LURTY, }
W. HICKMAN, } *Committee.*
E. H. O'BRIEN. }

MANCHESTER, MD., }
July 11, 1857. }

GENTLEMEN:—The Address was prepared especially for you, and without any purpose on my part of making a further use of it. It is, therefore, at your service as you request.

I am, gentlemen, very truly yours,

C. H. FOSTER.

To Messrs. W. S. Lurty, W. Hickman, E. H. O'Brien, Committee.

ORATION.

CADETS :

The day whose sun has latest lighted us from sleep to wakefulness suggests, in its vivid memories, the theme of Patriotism. The place wherein we stand—these academic shades—yonder institution dedicated to learning, *datum ad literas deumque*, no less remind me of the claims of Culture. Thus these two elements of the higher life of humanity, are met. Side by side they take their places in our sight to-day, and, by their regal nature, by the large dominancy they hold over the souls of men, they command from us, not alone a passing recognition, as to honored guests, but the full gift of whatever tribute we have brought hither. Turning away, then, from those other but inferior themes, which, in virtue of the occasion we commemorate, might claim regard, I accept the omen of the hour, and pay my homage to these imperial presences.

I will ask your attention, therefore, for the time which it falls to me to detain you, to a consideration of the relations of Culture and Patriotism. For I cannot find merely an accidental union in their present meeting, but must look upon them as joined in a beneficent and providential harmony. Proud and secure as is each in its own individual empire, sovereign as they are, each of them, in their independent dignities and several rights, it would still seem as though the noblest flower of both were foreordained, in the pre-established concord of things, to appear only in their express and permanent alliance. The one is a sentiment, having its lodgment in the universal heart of man, and anchoring his devotion and undying love to the soil of his nativity; a questionless instinct inwrought so deeply in the fabric of our nature as calmly to

defy all scrutiny; a potential voice, bidding us to venerate, with no unwilling honors, the ties of country, nation, home and race. The other gives development to the various forces of our being, calling forth all of them to a nobler estate, and to an ampler sphere of action; alike dignifying the individual man, and aggrandizing, by its kindly influence, that great aggregation of individuals, society. Patriotism is the large love for those akin to us in the remembrances of that common and glorious ancestry, whose heroism we all cherish as a joint renown; whose virtues, while we emulate them with eager zeal, animate us, by the whispers of revered traditions, to prove ourselves not unworthy of our mutual sires. So that, as we, alike, remember, reverently, the founders of our State, whose stalwart arms builded the heritage which we enjoy as lords; we find a growing spirit of fraternity binding us together as a compact whole, and teaching us, by the most significant monitions, that ours is a united destiny, and that the generations of our posterity have a common future. Culture, which is but mental thrift, comes in to aid in our endeavors to improve and beautify the land which it is given us to dwell in; to make comely and durable the institutions that have descended to us; to advance our race to a higher rank amongst the tribes of men. Thus, Patriotism supplies the impelling force, while Culture furnishes the means and agencies of a national progress. While Patriotism at first gropes blindly towards the goal, Culture gives direction to its effort, and leads it to success. Through Culture, all the tendencies of our complex humanity, and this of Patriotism with the rest, are brought from their truant waywardness, and taught, by a prudent discipline, the true uses of their exercise. Patriotism bears then to Culture, the relation of a docile child to a discreet and virtuous teacher; nor can there be any rational alarm lest the yielding trustfulness of the one in the other may be abused. There is no slightest peril of perversion, from unwise or harmful counsels, while Patriotism sits as a pupil at the feet of such a sage. Through the genial tuition of Culture, Patriotism becomes intelligent; her vague instincts ripen into insight and foresight; her erratic energies

are trained to steady and persistent effort; her impulses are developed into conscious aims; and she is, thenceforward, a force endowed with all the elements of conquest, fitted to ally herself to destiny.

The *positive* benefit of Culture, in its relation to Patriotism, is, then, in its education; in the wise direction of its else untutored and wasted energy; in the instruction of it in its intrinsic capacities; in the enlargement of its practical efficiency; in refining and intensifying it to a prompt exactitude and concentration of action; in the gladiatorial discipline of its entire being. There would be peril, however, to the State, in the expansion and training of this sentiment, without some chastening influences to moderate its ardor,—some prudent limitations which should be laws to its activity and keep it within due bounds. Otherwise, it might break forth into anarchy, and defeat the very objects it proposed. But Culture has its restraining government, no less than its impelling inspirations. If its judicious guidance be obeyed, there need be no dangers to the State; unless, indeed, the State be founded on a lie, and repudiate the rights of man. Then, Culture and Patriotism, both of them, are full of hazards. Neither of them can have any sympathy for despotism. If not utterly exiled, they must hide in corners, and speak only hypocrisy and falsehood. For Culture is, in its true character, of necessity, humane. It cannot hesitate to exclaim with Terence: *Nihil humani a me alienum puto*. I speak not of a merely elegant and superficial scholarship, which revels in trifles, and deals with nothing nobler than polite learning and fine art; but of that hardier, manlier Culture, which acknowledges the authority of thought; which pays homage to eternal principles; which finds its aliment in the teachings of Philosophy and Ethics. This, the only genuine Culture is the friend of individual man. It can never strike hands with tyranny, and become the minister of its purposes; it can never urge a defrauded people to submission. And so with Patriotism, this, too, is essentially popular in its sympathies; and reaches out with eagerness toward democracy as its proper sphere.

For, my readings of history allow me to make no doubt that Patri-

otism, cardinal and organic as it is in the nature of man, flourishes best and most healthfully, under the benign protection of free government. Wherever the sovereignty of a realm is centred in the person of one man, wherever the people are ignored as an active element of the State, there can be no earnest and efficient Patriotism; it exists only as a smouldering fire, dead save in the possibility, at some better epoch, of a resurrection, to become a living power. The vast armies of Xerxes, Alexander and the Roman Cæsars, were but serfs and implements. Their obedience was not a genuine loyalty, but a grovelling submission to superior power. For the true loyalty is found in freedom. It is voluntary, not slavish and compelled. Upon those historic pages where crowns and kings and thrones appear, while no single word tells us of the recognition of a people, you shall not find any record of patriotic deeds, any legend of devoted loyalty. Despotism and Patriotism cannot co-exist. It is true we may find scattered here and there, some touching story of personal devotedness on the part of a soldier to his tyrant, some instance of heroic self-sacrifice where a valorous adherent has interposed his life to save a despotic monarch from death at the hands of a foe on the battlefield, or from the covert stroke of the assassin; but these are only the few exceptions which relieve the otherwise monotonous chronicle of conquest and oppression from its blank denial of individual humanity. Similar incidents of the self-forgetfulness of slaves and of romantic attachment to masters, may be found in all the records of servitude. But they cannot fairly be cited as proceeding from any sentiment at all approaching Patriotism, that broad and intelligent affection which sets no man, whether self or the king, higher than country. It is true that the grandeur of a consolidated empire, like those of Persia, Macedon and Rome, holding in possession, by the strong hand of usurpation, wide regions of territory; dominating perhaps over the sea as well as the land; gigantic in its material resources; with myriads of men, its obedient and facile vassals, and able to concentrate the whole weight of its colossal strength upon a single point, at a dash of the dictator's pen;—the greatness of

such an empire might inspire the songs of a pampered poet, and the epic of a Virgil, or the ballads of a singing Horace, might be offered as tribute to the imperial master, who, in his single person, was the epitome of the nation, the lord paramount of the State. But it is only the high and stimulating sense of citizenship, of individual manhood, of allegiance to a country which is a fatherland rather than a prison, that could summon forth the inspiring hymns of freedom;—those exultant strains, quivering with the very soul of Patriotism, in which the goddess Liberty herself would seem to have taken the muse's place;—those best fruits of poesy since the world began,—noble utterances, which, echoing deathlessly around our planet, shall prove, forever, awakening voices to break the slumbers of every house of bondage. Such strains reverberate along all the corridors of history, celebrating many a refreshing episode of liberty in the long process of mankind. They are the best possessions of humanity; for they are winged words of night, which can never be silenced or recalled; which all men in time shall hear; and to which all souls shall respond rejoicingly. They are the evangel of freedom to all peoples. For the poets are, truly, prophets, and the intuition of their entrancing dreams is laden with the wisdom of veritable foresight. Their songs are purchased by the patronage of no Mæcenas, or Louis XIV, but they come as the spontaneous offering of grateful hearts. The servile muse may produce as much of grace, and voluptuous elegance, and tenderness; but it cannot reach the grandeur, the high elation, the massiveness of manhood, the nobility of enthusiasm, the vigor of language, the militant clang of melody, the firmness of resolve, the sublime fatalism of will, which distinguish the lyrics of the free. The songs of slaves may be compared to the delicately carved cameoes of the ancients, over each of which, some enslaved craftsman has toiled, binding down eye and brain and muscle to a stone, for years. The songs of freemen are rather like those stately gothic structures, whose noble architecture in itself typifies and promises the dignity of labor and the perfectness of Art, while it asks no degrading service, no sacrifice of the manhood of the workman. It

was only from the heart of a freeman that there could issue these clarion words :

A people's voice ! we are a people yet,
 Tho' all men else their nobler dreams forget,
 Confused by brainless mobs and lawless powers ;
 Thank Him who isled us here, and roughly set
 His Saxon in blown seas and storming showers.
 We have a voice, with which to pay the debt
 Of boundless love and reverence ~~and~~ regret
 To those great men who fought, and kept it ours.
 And keep it ours, O God, from brute control ;
 O statesmen, guard us, guard the eye, the soul
 Of Europe ; keep our noble England whole ;
 And save the one true seed of freedom sown
 Betwixt a people and their ancient throne.
 That sober freedom out of which there springs
 Our loyal passion for our temperate kings.

So it is, and has been, and, by the necessity of an iron law, must it be for evermore. Under the reign of violence and tyranny, there may be idyls of Anacreon and Moschus, the soft notes of lutes and lyres,—an exquisiteness of fine poetic fervor,—the light dalliance of pleasure,—the gaiety of serfs who are careless of the morrow so that they have delights to-day, who think not of rights so that they find enjoyments,—there may be beauty in artistic labor,—there may be a satisfied content in sense ; but it is only when a People is recognized in the State,—it is only when the best nobility of life is confessed to be a free manhood,—it is only when the badges of royalty are distributed amongst the masses, so that each man has a fragment of the old-time crown and sceptre, and is, in some sort, a sovereign,—that human life becomes a grand and solemn drama, in which we are, each of us, actors needed to the completeness of the whole ; it is only then that the worthier issues of thought and deed appear. Then it is, that the sentiment of Patriotism, of burning and glad devotion to that social whole of which every individual is an honored part ;—that sentiment, which, in the earlier

stages of the human march, was but a vague and glimmering instinct, significant only like the rudimentary fossils in old geologic formations, as being prophetic of an unfulfilled creation ;—then it is that it receives its full and fair development, and rules our souls as a daily and potential thought. Then does the true fealty to the State begin. Then, for the first time, can there be such a crime as treason.

The conduct of my argument is now disclosed. I deny that Patriotism, in its genuine manifestation, can exist in any community which ignores the separate rights of men. I maintain that, in proportion as government is popular in character ; in proportion as it becomes admitted that the State was made for persons, and not persons for the State ; as it becomes admitted that the nation can have no right superior to what the one man possesses ; so will the love of country strengthen till it becomes a mighty cable, whose stout strands are woven of all the household ties of the nation,—a dominant idea made all the stronger by the associations of hearthstones and homes, by the bonds of kindred interests and a community of benefits. Such a State can hold its place against a world in arms. Thus has Switzerland for centuries, preserved her freedom in the face of European kingcraft ; and looked down, securely, from her mountain fastnesses, upon raging armies ; knowing that her name could never disappear from the roll of peoples, so long as one Swiss survived. I claim that, as the individual becomes identified with his country,—an integral portion of the State, his Patriotism will partake of the strong and eager quality of self-love ; the national defence will appear a matter of self-preservation, and the national glory and greatness will seem to transfigure him with their brightening beams.

Patriotism, therefore, this implanted affection, this radical instinct of our nature, is no less than a prophecy, speaking, through long and toilsome generations of bondage, in the soul of each separate man, of the final establishment of freedom as the rightful estate of humanity, the deserved reward of ages of conflict and endeavor. For, since this sentiment attains its complete unfolding, and its most genuine expres-

sion only in free government; since it is here most definitely pronounced; it points, clearly, from out the darkness of old tyrannies, to the realization of republicanism, to the coronation of the people as the only king. It announces the idea of liberty, as another and holier emotion of our nature—worship, announces the idea of God.

Poland and Hungary, have given us, in later times, the most conspicuous examples of the love of country. But he errs widely who sees only the spirit of nationality, as the inspiration of Polish and Hungarian heroes in their persistent struggles against despotism. The patriots were identified, by every interest and relationship, with the ancient realms which they strove to rescue from the oblivion that threatened to engulf them. As every Israelite, wheresoever his lot is cast, carries with him thither the old Hebrew commonwealth; as the memories of Solomon and Samuel, and the goodly fellowship of the prophets, accompany the Jew, through all his wanderings; so did each soldier of Hungary and Poland feel himself an essential element of his State, pledged to defend her, and fight manfully as her knight, so long as his life endured. Those were ideal contests, with the most tremendous material forces; a sentiment, illuminated and aggrandized by vivid imaginings, alas! never to be realized, nerved him to the shock, and spiritual aids came down to him like angels, amidst the dust of battle.

To speak of American Patriotism were a needless task. The labors and hardships of the founders of these states have been made classical forever; so that the last quarter of the eighteenth century embraces what is truly our heroic age. The war of Revolution was not altogether a war of military arms. It was, in the truest sense, an intellectual struggle. After full discussion on both sides of the Atlantic, the cause of the colonies had been amply vindicated; and Pitt was as true a champion of our independence, in the British Parliament, as was Adams in the Continental Congress. In this, more signally than in any other conflict which history records, was the power of principles exhibited. For Right is Might. That cause which has strong convictions of justice upon its side, is already half victorious, for,

“Thrice is he armed who hath his quarrel just.”

The declaration of American Independence was no rash nor sudden movement. It was the authoritative and collective expression of the sentiment of the colonies; a sentiment which had been arrived at through intent counsels and severe deliberations; which was shared by nearly the whole body of the people; which was based upon the plainest rudiments of political ethics, and which the judgment of impartial history has approved already. The country was ripe for it; indeed, in some localities it had been anticipated, as at Mecklenburg, North Carolina. The questions at issue between Great Britain and the colonies had been fairly argued; and the decision had been left with confidence to the common sense of mankind. So each soldier fought, through all that arduous seven years fight, with the energy and courage of a personal encounter. The victory, if won, was to be a triumph of the people; and the inspiring vision of freedom within their reach, should they but approve themselves worthy to obtain it, aroused a Patriotism so intense, so unanimous, so unconquerable, as to stand, for all the past and for all time to come, unmatched; a devotedness of life, fortune, fame,—all that is dear to man, which no struggle that may engage humanity, in any age hereafter, can surpass or parallel.

Nor did this spirit of Patriotism abdicate its power upon the victorious issue of our arms. It then assumed a polemic character. The conflict of opinions that ensued upon the Revolutionary epoch, was, no less than that, an *agonistic* era. It was a battle of ideas and principles. Out of the chaos of opinions, two leading ideas very soon emerged, Democracy and Federalism. The result of their combat is found in the Constitution of the United States. Opposite and irreconcilable as these ideas at first appeared, each tempered the ultraism of the other, a salutary compromise took place; and they have, both of them, to-day, their record in that noble charter which commemorates our erection into a single nation.

Thus do we stand, on this eighty-first anniversary of the proclamation of our separateness as a sovereign society;

“The heir of all the ages, foremost in the files of time.”

For, not alone the events of our own colonial history, or of our national existence, have contributed to make us what we are. The storehouse of antiquity opens to supply us with abundant treasures; our regal dowry comes to us gathered from all the generations who have gone before; we find meet patterns of wisdom and moderation amidst the citizens of the old republics. The philosophies of Greece, the maxims of Rome, the hard experiences of disappointed peoples,—Poland, Italy, France and Hungary; all are ours; ours with their lessons of true greatness, and their admonitions to unsleeping vigilance; ours with their examples, their precepts, their warnings, their inspirations.

The scholar, certainly, should be the sincerest patriot. Our governmental system, in the nice adjustment of its forces, in the harmony and oneness of its action, demonstrates forcibly the practical value of ideas. The foundations of it are laid in abstract truths. It is built not upon special social necessities; not upon traditionary prepossessions; not upon forced expedients; but upon the axioms of a fresh political philosophy; upon pure principles of ethics; upon thoughts, which, when just, are the most solid of all building stones. To our fathers, when they set out to erect this mighty structure, in which dwell at this moment, so many millions of freemen, it was as if the old globe had dissolved, with all its crimes and woes, and the world had begun anew. They wrought, therefore, unencumbered by incongruous materials, at liberty to choose or to reject at will; and the product of their work is now before all our eyes.

Such a system, having such a basis, and such a superstructure, with the countless opportunities it presents to independent, self-reliant effort, with its hopeful possibilities of national development, inaugurated with omens whose happy portent has, already, been more than realized, furnishes, as a mere study for the student even, the best attractions. The simple calculations of the mathematician seeking to conjecture one probable *status* in population and territory, a century hence, predicated upon our advancement hitherto, outstrip the most enthusiastic visions that could have cheered the heart of a poet of the Revolution.

When, ascending from these merely safe deductions, casting aside our estimates, we reflect that Providence has given us evident and ample tokens of His cherishing care, when we consider that the threads of our destinies are in the hands of Him who determines, in his wisdom, the fate of nations; when we read our future by the light of that history, which one, speaking wiser than he knew, has called philosophy teaching by example; we cannot but believe, with undoubting faith, that the most hopeful dreams of philosophers and poets, if they be just and rational, may here be all fulfilled. In this new field, kindly thrown open to humanity as another Eden, by our Heavenly Father, that our race, suffering under the accumulated wrongs of ages, might again take heart, and, under better auspices, re-enter upon its work, we may trust that the hopes, that echo down to us along the centuries, may at length, be realized. For the poets were not wrong, because their predictions had no fulfilment. There were, always, stubborn institutions, deep rooted prejudices, harsh and unmanageable facts, which were fatal to success. So that the errand of the poets is not over. Always the guides and teachers of men, it is still their mission to unfold the possible. That possible it is for us to make the actual. To us Americans, hitherto, thought has appeared, constantly, as the herald of fresh victories. The corner stone of our commonwealth is an idea. Ideas are the inspirations of our political contests, and it is some *doctrine* which triumphs, with every partizan success. Thus party and faction have their uses, in our civil economy; finding their office in separating the good from the evil, the beautiful from the uncomely, the true from the false. The very fanaticisms of the age are evidences of inward health; for the counsels of that strong conservatism, which is a peculiar characteristic of American mind, will correct the vices in them all, while it will not fail to accept the salutary hints they furnish, and apply them towards such reforms as a candid scrutiny may show to be demanded.

The duty of the scholar appears, then, plain. Pledged to a "determined conservation of the Union," he will not forget the majesty of

the separate States; for he knows that out of the States, acting as independent governments, came all the powers and sanctions of the Union, and that their original sovereignty is not totally surrendered to the confederacy, but only divided with it. And, furthermore, while he recognizes his State as having strong claims upon his loyalty, he will remember, none the less, the inviolable sacredness of private rights. He will oppose the wanton vagaries and impracticable schemes of merely speculative politicians; but he can never denounce radicalism as entirely futile, or refuse to meet, with candor, the theories of innovation. He will welcome the largest freedom of discussion, confident that "error may be safely tolerated, if truth be left free to combat it." Confessing the need of permanence in our institutions and policy, he should, yet, gladly hail all auguries of progress. Whether he enter upon the tempestuous sea of politics, with its strifes and bitternesses, or pass his life in some more quiet walk of effort, his duty to his country will be always a word of power to summon him to his post, in any time of danger. A student of all which pertains to the common weal, he will not fail to come forward, if ever the fury of faction threaten the safety of the republic, to do what in him lies to restore quietude and order, and to bring back contentment to the body of the people. If changes be necessary to the welfare of the masses, he will not be so wedded to old forms, as to set himself against them, since he believes that government is ordained for the masses, not they for it. The national system will appear to him, not a mere machine,

"To wheels of steel and iron pinions bound,"

but rather, as the Scandinavians figured the universe, like the great tree *Igdrasil*, rooted in the core of the world, branching towards the heavens, and quick with forces of perpetual growth. By the habitual faith he cherishes in the large possibilities of America, and in the great destiny which awaits us in the future, his Patriotism will be deepened and expanded, until he comes to look upon his country as the nucleus of a world-wide confederacy of free republics, which shall at last

gather into its league all the sons of men, and bring in, at its completion, the new golden age, the reign of Peace, and Truth, and Universal Freedom. His soul can then commune with that of the bard, who sings :

I'dipt into the Future, far as human eye could see,
 Saw the vision of the world, and all the wonder that should be ;
 Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
 Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales ;
 Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rained a ghastly dew,
 From the nations' airy navies, grappling in the central blue ;
 Far along the world-wide whisper of the South wind rushing warm,
 With the standards of the peoples, plunging through the thunder storm ;
 Till the war-drum throbbed no longer, and the battle flags were furled,
 In the PARLIAMENT OF MAN, the FEDERATION OF THE WORLD ;
 There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe,
 And the kindly earth shall slumber wrapt in universal law.



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